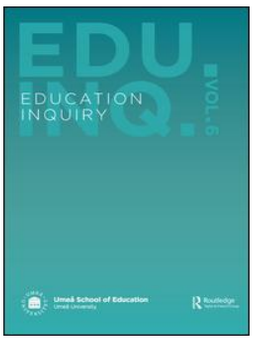
þÿ B e c o m i n g a s p e c i a l e d u c a t o r F i n n i s h a n d S w e d views of their future profession

Takala, Marjatta

2015-03

Takala , M , Wickman , K , Uusitalo-Malmivaara , L & Lundström , A 2015 , ' Becoming a þÿ s p e c i a l e d u c a t o r F i n n i s h a n d S w e d i s h s t u d e n t s ' v i e w s o f t h e i r f u t u r e Education Inquiry , vol. 6 , no. 1 , 24329 , pp. 25-51 . https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.24329

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/231732
https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.24329



Education Inquiry

ISSN: (Print) 2000-4508 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/zedu20

Becoming a special educator – Finnish and Swedish students' views on their future professions

Marjatta Takala, Kim Wickman, Lotta Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Agneta Lundström

To cite this article: Marjatta Takala, Kim Wickman, Lotta Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Agneta Lundström (2015) Becoming a special educator – Finnish and Swedish students' views on their future professions, Education Inquiry, 6:1, 24329, DOI: 10.3402/edui.v6.24329

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.24329

Education Inquiry
Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2015, pp. 25–51

Becoming a special educator – Finnish and Swedish students' views on their future professions

Marjatta Takala[*†], Kim Wickman[**], Lotta Uusitalo-Malmivaara[***] & Agneta Lundström[****]*

Abstract

In this article, we discuss the views of 117 special education student teachers related to their oncoming profession in the framework of ecological theory. Together, 68 students from Sweden (26 special teachers and 41 SENCo students) and 49 from Finland responded to a questionnaire. We compared the respondents' thoughts about their future work content, the focus areas of special education and inclusion. According to the expectations, the main task for these future special educators is to work with pupils and adults at school. The focus areas of their future work included co-operation and consultation, more so in Sweden. In addition, excellent interaction skills were central. The Swedish respondents supported full inclusion to a greater extent than the Finnish respondents. Finally, no critical aspects of resource allocation or conditions to ensure the child's right to adequate support within the existing school systems were emphasised by the respondents. The results and the differences among the various respondents are discussed.

Keywords: special education, expectations, special teacher, SENCO, ecological model

Introduction

This article examines students' expectations of their future professions and, in the theoretical section, compares the curricula of special education studies in two universities in Finland and in one university in Sweden.

More precisely, we are interested in the expectations special education student teachers have of their future work. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977, 1979) is used as a framework for structuring the elements of special educators' work expectations according to various systemic levels. The theory was originally used in a study in which child development was conceptualised within the context of layered environmental influences (also see Meyers et al. 2014). Further, we will present the content of special teacher education in these two countries. These countries are neighbours and are part of the Nordic welfare system (Arnesen and Lundahl

[†]Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marjatta Takala, Teacher Education, Department of Special Education, Siltavuorenpenger 3 A, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland. Email: marjatta.takala@helsinki.fi and Institute of Pedagogy, Umeå University, Sweden. Email: marjatta.takala@umu.se.
*Institute of Pedagogy, Umeå University, Sweden and Department of Special Education, Helsinki University, Finland. Email: marjatta.takala@helsinki.fi.
**Department of Education, Umeå University, Sweden. Email: kim.wickman@umu.se.
***Department of Special Education, Helsinki University, Finland. Email: lotta.uusitalo-malmivaara@helsinki.fi.
****Department of Applied Educational Science, University of Umeå, Sweden. Email: agneta.lundstrom@edusci.umu.se.

Citation: *Education Inquiry* (EDUI) 2015, **6**, 24329, http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.24329

2006; Blomqvist 2004). They are fairly similar socially, for instance, both countries have free comprehensive education for all pupils, which began in Finland in 1970 (Ahonen 2003) and in Sweden in 1962 (Lindensjö and Lundgren 2000). However, there are three main factors in the educational policy that distinguish the Finnish system from that of the Swedish.

The first factor is the teacher education programme, which has a longer duration and is more valued by students in Finland. The second factor is the existence and progression of an independent school system in Sweden (Lundahl et al. 2013). Since the 1960s and 1970s, Sweden has been known internationally as an example of a strong welfare state. However, like a number of other Western countries, Sweden has become more market-oriented. The school policy has followed the shift in political ideology and undergone a period of dramatic change. From being one of the most centralised democracies, Sweden has become one of the most decentralised countries with the result being mixed school systems (Berge 2013). This has had, for example, a decreasing effect on the provision of special education, with fewer of such services being offered in independent schools (Ramberg 2013). Although there are almost no independent schools in Finland, there is, however, a possibility for parents to choose a school for their child. Consequently, since this space of individual choice exists, parents' engagement, educational level and socioeconomic background may also impact on their decision. Many schools have some special programmes, thus putting more emphasis on subjects like music, sports or mathematics, which attract families. This can also be seen as a consequence of the marketing effect. The third difference between these countries is the greater extent of special education in Finland than in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013; Statistics Finland 2013).

Inclusion and the Education Systems

An inclusive educational policy began earnestly with the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO 1994) and has grown in many countries over the past 20 years. This policy has guided countries to decrease the level of segregated special education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2013a). Inclusion means the increasing participation of all students in mainstream curricula, cultures and communities. Inclusion as an educational policy is based on the principle that local schools should provide suitable education for all children. It encompasses more than just focusing on teaching children with impairments in regular school settings. It can be seen as an approach to education that includes the value of equal rights of all children (see Ainscow, Boot and Dyson 2006; Booth and Ainscow 2002). The promotion of inclusive education engenders the development of an inclusive society in which all citizens can fully participate. To be realised within schools, inclusive education also demands inclusive teacher education (Forlin 2010; Kalenga and Fourie 2011). Although it is claimed that inclusion is the dominant policy in the educational documents (Ministry of Education and Culture 2007; 2014;

The Swedish National Commission for UNESCO 2008) of both Sweden and Finland, they still have special schools and special classes with special educators working in them. Special education still exists in primary and secondary schools, yet special education and individual solutions have sometimes been considered as barriers to equal education as children do not have access to similar educational opportunities in segregated groups (also see Saloviita 2012). Nevertheless, an increasing amount of support is given in regular schools, and the number of special educators working in inclusive settings is growing in Sweden and Finland (Halinen and Järvinen 2008; Isaksson, Lindqvist and Bergstöm 2010; Takala et al. 2012). Based on these arguments, our main research question concerns the expected content of special educators' future work in an inclusive school.

Our framework is based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1977; 1979), which will function as a conceptual organiser of our results; we will use the theory's four systems as a framework for students' expectations. These systems include, first, the *microsystem*, that is, the classroom, a special teacher's resource room or some other microsystem at school where the teacher is a member, such as an extended learning team. The second is the *mesosystem*, which refers to other settings outside school where the student teacher can be a participant, but this external participation must have an effect on the microsystem at school. Nevertheless, a mesosystem can also be seen as a connection between different microsystems, and here in the mesosystem we include the other teachers as well as professionals who are external to the school. The *exosystem* is the third level of ecological systems theory and refers to events or actions in which the participants in the microsystem do not participate but which have an influence on the microsystem. These are, for example, established social and educational polices. Finally, the *macrosystem* consists of social and cultural values and beliefs which have an effect on persons in the microsystem (also see Kalenga and Fourie 2014; Odom and Diamond 1998).

Regulating Special Education in Finland and Sweden

Special education in Swedish schools is mainly represented by special teachers and special pedagogues. Swedish special pedagogues are also called special needs co-ordinators (Lindqvist 2013) or SENCos, like their colleagues in the UK (Pearson 2010). The work profiles of SENCos in Sweden and the UK overlap significantly; both work in co-operation with the head of the school, and both are consultation experts.

Some studies indicate (Lindqvist 2013; Takala and Ahl 2014) that, compared to special teachers, who seem to work more in direct contact with pupils, SENCos work more on an organisational level. Yet, this seems to vary slightly from school to school. In Finland, there are no such professionals as SENCos, only special teachers. Nevertheless, the amount of consultation work has recently increased, and some

municipalities have special consultative educator positions in Finland which can, to some extent, be considered equivalent to the SENCos in Sweden (also see Ministry of Education and Culture 2014). The Swedish division's two roles in special education reflect political intentions in education and have deep roots. However, this has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (e.g. Göransson, Nilholm and Karlsson 2011; Beach and Bagley 2013; Berhanu 2010).

In this article, we use the expression *special educators* to refer to both special teachers and SENCos.

Finnish law, as well as the school curriculum, provides guidelines for teaching in schools. The Finnish Basic Education Act (1998) and its Amendment (2010) stipulate that support needs to be given immediately when needed. The Amendment (2010) specifies three types of support, namely, general, intensified and special. If general support proves insufficient, intensified support, with a learning plan, can be given. The main difference is the amount and intensity of the support. Special educators are either directly or indirectly involved in all these forms of support. Pupils in need of special support are entitled to an individual educational plan (IEP), which has been made compulsory (Amendments to the Finnish Basic Education Act 642/2010). The Swedish Act on Education (2010, 800) also points out that all children have to be given the guidance and encouragement they need in their learning and their personal development and that there should be no division on the basis of different forms of support. However, since 2006, all pupils in Sweden have been entitled to an *individual developmental plan* (IDP), including summary assessments in all school subjects (Swedish National Agency for Education 2005; 2008). Moreover, like their Finnish counterparts, all pupils who need additional support are entitled to an *individual educational plan* (IEP). Consequently, in Sweden, two documents are required for pupils with special educational needs: an IDP and an IEP. Historically, the use of IEPs in Sweden has been strongly linked to the ideological goals of a 'school for all' policy emphasising egalitarian principles and demands for support for all pupils who do not reach education-related goals (Asp-Onsjö 2012).

The Swedish National Curriculum enumerates that schools have a special responsibility for students who have difficulties in reaching education-specific goals (Swedish National Agency for Education 2011; 2012). Likewise, the Finnish National Curriculum underlines the importance of support when needed (Finnish National Board on Education 2011). While special education is mainly administered in regular schools in both Finland and Sweden, both countries also run special classes or special schools.

Teacher Education

The macro system of teacher education can be said to consist of inclusion, democracy and human rights; the exosystem could be seen as the Ministry of Education

in Finland and in Sweden. It regulates teacher education, but it is then organised independently by universities, in the mesosystem. Teacher education at each university represents the microsystem.

In the context of Swedish teacher education, Beach and Bagley (2013) point to the discussion on the need for research-based professional knowledge. Their concern is that teacher education often seems to be reduced to teacher training, and educational theory is not well represented in teacher education. Instead, in both Sweden and England, teacher education has increasingly focused on practical preparation, not on theoretical aspects (Beach and Bagley 2013). They also talk about horizontal and vertical discourse. Horizontal discourse is context-bound and related to practical issues. On the contrary, vertical discourse is theoretical and abstract. The latter is needed to describe, model and theorise empirical situations, to understand ideological and political frames and as a tool for critical thinking. Horizontal professional knowledge leads to a pre-digested theory, thus suggesting a bleak future for teacher education (Beach and Bagley 2012; 2013). The research base of special teacher education needs to be improved in many countries as this represents an under-researched area; research tends to focus more on regular teacher education (also see Brownell et al. 2005).

In Finland, on the contrary, teacher education is research-based, and research is the main organising principle. As a result, teachers are able to reflect on their own work and change practices according to research-based pedagogical thinking. There has been a master's degree in teacher education (300 credits) for more than 30 years (Jakku-Sihvonen and Niemi 2006; Kallioniemi et al. 2006; Kansanen 2014) and, in order to become a class or subject teacher in Finland, a student must first obtain a master's degree in education, which takes about five years. With this degree, a student needs an additional year to become a special teacher in Finland. This degree requires 60 additional credits. Without a previous degree, it takes about five years to become a special teacher. Teacher and special teacher education are also very popular study options in Finland, and it is difficult to gain access to them. For instance, less than 7 percent of applicants were accepted to Helsinki University's programme in teacher education in the spring of 2013 (University of Helsinki 2013). On the contrary, as teacher education is not considered attractive in Sweden, not all universities admit sufficient numbers. For example, at Umeå University, there have been more study places than applicants in teacher education (Swedish Higher Education Authority 2014).

A degree in teaching in Swedish is not a master's degree. Student teachers study for 3.5 years to become pre-school teachers and 4 years to become class teachers (Swedish Higher Education Authority 2014). A pre-school teaching degree consists of 210 credits, and a primary school teaching degree consists of 240 credits (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2013b). After this degree, students have to work for at least three years before they can apply for a study place in the

special needs programme. The studies are designed for 1.5 years, and students need to obtain 90 credits to become special teachers or SENCos (also see Lindqvist 2013). However, there is more flexibility in Sweden. Studies can also be accomplished at 'half pace', that is, a longer study period which allows the student to work parallel to their studies. Distance education is also used to a great extent. In Finland, studies are chiefly performed during one year via contact teaching and a very limited amount of distance education.

The Content of Special Educator Studies

In this article, we focus on one Swedish and two Finnish universities with special teacher education. All universities in these countries with teacher education have slightly different curricula; therefore, this is a kind of case study.

Swedish SENCos and special teachers have a somewhat different work profile, which affects the content of their studies. SENCos have a consultative function in relation to other teachers and are also expected to work in co-operation with the head of the school. Consulting as well as leadership issues are well represented in their studies (also see Lindqvist 2013). Tasks related to language, writing and reading development are not mentioned in the work requirements of SENCos (SFS 2007:638). Special teachers are more involved in working with pupils, mainly with reading, writing and/or mathematical issues. However, they also consult other with teachers (SFS 2007, 638; 2011, 186; Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2012). Their university studies include all of this content (see Table 1).

Table 1. Requirements in Umeå 2014 in order to study to become a special teacher or a SENCo

Content of SENCos' Education 90 cr	Credits	Content of Special Teacher Education 90 cr	Credits
The Field of Education for Special Needs	15	The Field of Education for Special Needs	15
Processes in Practice in the Field of Special Needs	7.5	Processes in Practice in the Field of Special Needs	7.5
Professional Counselling and Consultation in the Field of Special Education	7.5	Professional Counselling and Consultation in the Field of Special Education	7.5
Fields of Knowledge in Special Education	7.5	Specialisation in Language, Writing and Reading Development OR in Mathematical Development OR in Intellectual Impairment*	30 each
Evaluation, Leadership and Developmental Work	22.5		
Thesis	30	Thesis	30

*Not in our data

The Swedish course *The Field of Education for Special Needs* includes, for example, regulations on special education, international special education research and research-related issues, such as drawing up a questionnaire. The Swedish course *Processes in Practice in the Field of Special Needs* includes, for instance, discussions of identity categories relating to discrimination, participation and ethics as well as some research methods. Finnish special educators are supposed to teach pupils and co-operate with adults. The core content in the curricula of the universities offering special teacher education in Finland consists of theory and practice. They are primarily related to reading and writing, mathematics, communication and behavioural and socio-emotional challenges. Teaching practice is also considered an essential part of this education (Hausstätter and Takala 2008). These central areas are part of the 2014 curricula at Helsinki and Oulu universities (see Table 2).

One similarity in the Swedish and Finnish programmes (Tables 1 and 2) is that students in both countries study some areas more thoroughly, such as reading and writing challenges (except SENCos). Students in Sweden can focus more thoroughly on reading and communication (worth 30 credits) while their Finnish colleagues read less of everything although they cover a wider range of areas. At Umeå, the reading and writing course (30 credits) consists not only of reading- and writing-related issues but also of speech and communication challenges (8 credits) as well as issues relating to case study and individual educational plans (10 credits). In Finland, five credits are awarded entirely to reading- and writing-related issues. Both programmes include a thesis and studies in evaluation. The Finnish thesis is relatively small since the students would have already written a 40-credit thesis (pro gradu) in their master's studies. Leadership issues are

Table 2. Requirements in Oulu and Helsinki in 2014 in order to study to become a special teacher

Content of Special Teacher Education in Helsinki 40 cr + 20 cr	Credits	Content of Special Teacher Education in Oulu 40 cr + 20 cr	Credits
Basic Studies of Special Education	20	Basic Studies of Special Education	20
Professional Development	4	Special Education as a Profession	5
Reading, Writing and Communication Challenges	7	Reading and Writing Challenges	5
Behavioural Challenges	5	Socio Emotional Development and Pedagogy	5
Support for Learning	6	Development of Communication	5
Development and Evaluation	3	Cognitive Performance and Evaluation	5
Mathematical Challenges	3	Mathematical Challenges	4
Teaching Practice	6	Teaching Practice	6
Thesis*	3	Thesis	5
Society, Disability and Education	3	–	

*They have already written a master's thesis worth 40 credits

not mentioned in the Finnish programme nor is teaching practice mentioned in the curriculum of the University of Umeå (Umeå University 2013a; 2013b), although it is considered an essential area of study for special educators elsewhere (Conderman et al. 2012).

In an examination of the content of special education studies, it is interesting to observe that around the world similar kinds of issues are included in the studies. They include foundations of general and special education as well as special and general education methods (see Romero-Contreras et al. 2013; Sindelar et al. 2012). According to Farrell (2009), the underlying aspects that contribute to the understanding of special education are medical, social, psychotherapeutic and pedagogical. Legal, developmental and psycholinguistic aspects are also needed (Farrell 2009). This shows that special education is a broad, multi-scientific area.

Remarks about the Amount and Role of Special Education

Special education is different in Finland and Sweden in terms of quality and quantity. In Finland, the support system is extensive; special education is offered in every school, mainly in the form of so-called part-time special education. This form of special education does not demand a diagnosis of the pupil or any bureaucratic means in order to be entitled to it, so it is easily available (Takala, Pirttimaa and Törmänen 2009). According to a recently published longitudinal thesis (Panula 2013), this form of support is very beneficial to the students, but it also represents a challenge with regard to the universal inclusive policy (Takala et al. 2012; UNESCO 1994). A total of 7.6 percent of school-aged pupils received special support and 5.1 percent received intensified support in Finland in 2012 (Statistics Finland 2013). Part-time special education was received by 21.5 percent of all school-aged children between 2011 and 2012 in Finnish schools. This was divided into general (75%), intensified (12%) and special (13%) support (Statistics Finland 2013). In Sweden, almost 14 percent of pupils had an IEP in 2013, and 1.4 percent received support in a smaller group outside their regular group. The number was greater when the pupils were older and in the ninth grade; as many as 3.6 percent of boys and 2.3 percent of girls received such support (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013). Here, we will focus on special education in mainstream schools.

While we acknowledge the discussion on the models of disability (for more, see Swain, Griffiths and Heyman 2003), our focus is on the educational rights discourse. As Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2009) put it, we could talk about *educational rights* rather than *special educational needs*. However, this idea seems to have had little impact on current school practice. One concrete rights-related impact has been the IEP in both countries. Pupils have a right to receive a plan designed specifically for them. In addition, in Finland pupils have a right to receive support teaching or part-time special education as needed (Basic Education Act 1998, § 16). In Sweden, school teachers need to report to the head of the school if they have concerns that

some pupils may fail to reach educational goals (SPSM 2014). In addition, the principle that all pupils have the same rights at school is strongly represented in Sweden (Equal Rights 2012). Inclusive education is considered to promote the rights of all pupils to equal education. When does special education become a barrier to the equal rights of children?

Special educators in Sweden and Finland obtain their teaching degree and work as teachers before they commence studies to become special educators. Many of them have also worked as special educators without a formal qualification as class teachers or as preschool teachers. This means that they are well-educated and experienced students and a little older than traditional student teachers, which is the case in many countries (also see Sindelar et al. 2012). This also means that they have inside information about special education in schools before they begin their studies.

There are not many comprehensive studies analysing what Finnish and Swedish special student teachers and Swedish SENCo students think about their future work procedures or the strategies with which to maintain or change schools' ways of dealing with special needs. It is essential to understand how actors involved in school settings reflect upon these issues in order to make sense of what is going on in school (e.g. Lindqvist 2013; Van Manen 1993). Consequently, it will be interesting to see the layers of ecological systems theory represented in the results and whether they can be used to frame future teacher education. With this analysis, this study also aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion in the Nordic countries about how to improve teacher education.

Aims of the Study

In the present study, we compared the views of special education students in two very similar neighbouring Nordic countries – Sweden and Finland. Our main research question concerned the expectations that special education student teachers have of their future work. This included: 1) the main future focus areas of the work of special educators in school; 2) students' attitudes towards inclusion; and 3) students' expectations of their starting education. The first area is multipartite and consists of special educators' focus areas in school, their co-operation with other teachers, the extent of documentation and the basic knowledge and skill areas. We compare the views of Swedish and Finnish students. In addition, we compare the views of Swedish special teacher students and SENCo students.

Research Design

This research was conducted in three universities: the University of Helsinki ($n = 32$) and the University of Oulu ($n = 17$) in Finland and the University of Umeå in Sweden ($n = 68$). We selected two universities from Finland because our aim was to have equal representation from both countries. These universities were chosen because of their large size and for reasons of convenience.

Methodology

A questionnaire was delivered to special education students from all three universities in the autumn of 2013. An electronic questionnaire was used in both universities in Finland via the students' e-mail listing, and a paper-and-pen version was administered during a lecture in Sweden. Response rates were 51 percent from Helsinki, Finland, 85 percent from Oulu, Finland, and 100 percent from Umeå, Sweden.

The questionnaire contained 28 closed Likert-scale (1–5 *totally disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and totally agree*) questions probing students' expectations of the main focus area of special educators in school, co-operation, documentation, inclusion and their own university education (see Tables 5 and 6). Three open questions were administered to complement the quantitative data: 1) What do you expect of your special education studies? 2) Which essential issues must special educators be able to do/to know for their work? 3) What do you consider central to special education? In addition, five background variables were examined: gender, age, education, prior studies and prior work experience.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. The proportion of missing values in all variables varied between 0.0 and 2.6 percent. The missing values were random and were not imputed. Content and discourse analyses were used. For the content analysis, the data were reduced, preliminary categories were found and then condensed to final categories, which were named according to the main issue (perspective) in each category (also see Miles and Huberman 1994; Schilling 2006; Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2002). Second, after forming the categories, the content of all the responses was analysed in terms of the main emergent discourses. All responses were interrogated as an entity. For conformability, the researchers read the written responses independently and then compared each other's results. The level of agreement was high.

Participants

The participants had recently commenced their studies to become special educators. The age of the participants (Table 3) ranged from 24 to 58 years, with a mean of 39.7 years. The Swedes were statistically significantly older than the Finns, $t(108) = 2.54$, $p < .05$. In terms of work experience, there were no differences between the two countries. Two Swedish and five Finnish participants were male.

Table 3. Participants' background variables (sp. ed. = special education)

Country	No. of participants (117 altogether)	Mean age in years, (SD)	Work experience in special education?	Work experience in sp. ed. Mean of years (SD)
Sweden	68	41 (6.5)	yes 22; no 43	2 yrs. (2.9)
Finland	49	38 (8.1)	yes 21; no 28	3 yrs. (2.1)

Table 4. The prior education of our respondents

Degree	Swedish students*	Finnish students
Preschool teacher	12	–
Class teacher	36	24
Subject teacher	8	11
Class + subject teacher	3	7
Class + preschool teacher	5	6
Other	1	1

*Three did not mention their education

The Swedish participants were mainly class teachers (36) or preschool teachers (12), and the Finnish respondents were mostly class teachers (24) or had a subject teaching degree (11) (see Table 4).

Of the 68 Swedish students, 41 had chosen to study to become a SENCo and 26 to become a special teacher; one did not respond to this question. Answering the questionnaire was voluntary and strictly anonymous.

Results

The results are presented according to the research questions, starting with expectations in relation to various areas of special educators' work (Table 5). After that, we discuss expectations in relation to inclusion and special teacher education itself (Table 6). But first, the attitudes of the two countries are compared. Second, the associations between working years and attitudes in both countries are examined separately. Third, when possible, the differences between the attitudes of the two student groups in Sweden (SENCo students and special teacher students) are presented.

The work of special educators

As shown in Table 5, both Finnish and Swedish respondents considered that working with pupils was the main task of a special educator. Further, promoting a climate that is more accepting of diversity seemed important to both groups although it appeared more important to the Swedish respondents than to the Finnish ones, $t(114) = -2.28$, $p < .05$. More often than the Finns, the Swedes viewed the domain of learning difficulties as the main area of expertise of special teachers (not SENCos), $t(112) = -3.56$, $p < .01$. More than the Swedes, the Finns saw behavioural problems as their most challenging area of responsibility, $t(114) = 4.96$, $p < .001$.

Of all the respondents, 43 had work experience in special education. Among the Finnish students, there was a positive correlation, Pearson's $r = .37$, $p < .05$, between years at work and considering themselves as an expert in learning difficulties. Among the Swedish students, no such correlation existed.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of items related to special educators' work in practice, co-operation and documentation (ST = special teacher, SEr = special educator, SE = special education, LD = learning difficulties, T = teacher)

Items	Finnish sample (n = 49)	Swedish sample (n = 65–68)
Special educators' work in practice		
1. STs' main task is to work with pupils	3.98 (.90)	3.98 (1.06)
2. STs are mainly experts in LDs	2.82 (1.07)	3.48 (.90)
3. The most challenging part of an SEr's work is to deal with students with behavioural problems	3.90 (1.03)	2.99 (.95)
4. An SE needs to influence school climate to become more accepting of diversity	4.29 (.94)	4.61 (.60)
Co-operation		
5. Ts appreciate working with SErs	3.88 (.73)	4.04 (.97)
6. An SEr's key task is to coach other Ts to work with special needs pupils	3.71 (.96)	4.20 (.77)
7. Lack of time is the greatest obstacle to co-operation	4.08 (.98)	3.87 (.99)
8. Subject Ts do not want to co-operate with STs	2.82 (.81)	2.59 (1.19)
9. As an SE, I will mainly instruct a small group in my own separate class	2.59 (1.19)	1.84 (.80)
10. Class Ts want to work with SEs	3.51(.65)	3.88 (.80)
Documentation		
11. The IEP is an important document	4.41 (.71)	4.07 (.86)
12. All teachers systematically follow IEP guidelines	2.55 (.87)	2.90 (.87′)
13. The goals stated in IEPs are forgotten in daily school routines	3.45 (1.04)	3.21 (.99)
14. The goals in IEPs are systematically evaluated	3.08 (.91)	3.25 (1.08)
15. STs are overloaded with paperwork/documentation	3.59 (1.08)	3.31 (.97)
16. IEPs strongly guide SEs' work	3.67 (.90)	3.56 (.94)

Note. Scale for all items 1–5 (disagree-agree).

Co-operation

In both countries, the respondents felt that teachers appreciated co-operation with special educators (Table 5). However, subject teachers were not rated as very willing to work with special educators. The lack of planning time was seen as the greatest obstacle to co-operation (with any teacher group). More than Finnish students, Swedish students considered that *class* teachers were willing to work with special educators, $t(115) = -2.68$, $p < .01$. Moreover, more than the Finns, the Swedes emphasised the necessity to coach other teachers to work with pupils with special educational needs $t(113) = -3.00$, $p < .01$. Compared to the Swedes, the Finns preferred working with a small group of pupils in a separate room, $t(115) = 4.09$, $p < .001$. There were no correlations between the number of working years and attitudes towards co-operation in either country.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations of items related to *attitudes towards inclusion* and *study expectations*

Items	Finnish sample (n = 49)	Swedish sample (n = 65–68)
Inclusion		
17. I support inclusion with no reservations	3.41 (.89)	3.32 (.95)
18. Overall, inclusion is a complicated issue	4.37 (.91)	4.56 (.85)
19. Inclusion does not suit every child	4.08 (1.08)	3.21 (1.21)
20. Practical matters must not restrict a child's right to study among his/her peers in a regular class	4.10 (.85)	4.62 (.75)
21. Special teaching separate from a child's own class is necessary	2.84 (.99)	2.90 (.99)
22. All special teaching can be delivered in a child's own class	2.31 (.98)	2.64 (1.06)
Education		
23. Special teacher education should also include research education	3.06 (1.09)	4.38 (.65)
24. I mostly want to attain formal compe-tence from my education	2.31 (1.10)	2.63 (1.11)
25. Education must be close to practice	4.37 (.91)	3.50 (.99)
26. Education has to have a firm theoretical background	3.86 (.91)	3.85 (.78)
27. All teachers need special education studies	4.41 (.77)	4.61 (.58)
28. Distance learning and reading books do not make a special educator; contact teaching is also needed	4.88 (.39)	4.25 (1.04)

Note. Scale for all items 1–5 (disagree-agree).

Documentation

Respondents in both countries saw the IEP as an important document (Table 5) although the IEPs were regarded as more important by the Finnish students, $t(114) = 2.23$, $p < .05$. However, the Finns held a more pessimistic view of teachers' ability to work according to IEP recommendations, $t(115) = -2.16$, $p < .05$. The load and guiding role of paperwork was seen as moderately heavy in both countries.

Paperwork and various kinds of documentation have recently increased in Finnish schools with the demands for three types of support (Strategy of Special Education 2007). The same has happened in Sweden with its two plans for all pupils in need of support (Lindqvist 2013; Swedish National Agency for Education 2008).

Next, we will discuss inclusion and teacher education. All the results are summarised in Table 6. We will point out the most interesting findings below.

Inclusion

Inclusion was supported but viewed as a complicated issue (Table 6). The Swedish students supported full inclusion to a greater extent than the Finnish students, $t(113) = 3.99$, $p < .001$. In addition, the Swedish respondents agreed more on the

child's right to study in his/her own class irrespective of practical matters, $t(115) = -3.46$, $p < .01$. Consequently, more than the Swedes, the Finns had a preference for instructing a small group in their own classroom (see the results for co-operation).

In both countries, there was a positive correlation between working years and attitudes towards inclusion (the item "inclusion does not suit every student"), Pearson's $r = -.36$, $p < .05$ (Finland), and Pearson's $r = -.30$, $p < .05$ (Sweden). The longer a student had worked in special education, the more he/she believed that inclusion suited every child.

In items probing special educators' work in practice, co-operation and documentation or inclusion, there were no statistically significant differences between the special student teachers and SENCO students in the Swedish sample.

Education

The content of the university training was also evaluated. More than the Finnish students, the Swedish students believed that special teacher education should include research methods, $t(115) = -8.21$, $p < .001$ (Table 6). On the other hand, and somewhat in line with this, compared to the Swedes, the Finns had a greater preference for teacher education to be practical, $t(115) = 4.86$, $p < .001$. All respondents felt strongly that special educational studies were also needed in general teacher education. In addition, they all appreciated contact teaching as a way of learning to become a special educator. As a way of studying, both distance and contact education have been used in both countries. Compared to the Swedes, the Finns had a greater appreciation for contact teaching, $t(114) = 4.01$, $p < .001$.

Years at work and the demand for practical education had a negative correlation, Pearson's $r = -.47$, $p < .05$ with the Finns. The more the Finns had worked, the more they desired something other than just practical advice. Among the Swedes, a positive correlation, Pearson's $r = .47^*$, $p < .05$, was obtained between working years and the desire to include training to become a researcher in special teacher education.

The only significant difference between the two student groups in Sweden was found in the item probing special teacher education. Compared to the SENCo students ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.03$), the special student teachers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .69$) had a desire for teacher education to be more practical, $t(65) = 3.18$, $p < .01$

The responses to the open-ended question – *What do you expect of your studies?* – were in line with the quantitative results. An interesting theme concerned the appropriate proportion of theory and practice. The Finnish students mentioned both theoretical and practical knowledge. The word *practical* was used 28 times among 49 Finnish responses, but the word *theory* came up seven times. There was a desire for practical tools as well as for new thoughts and skills in relation to learning difficulties, behavioural challenges and consultation. The Swedish respondents had a

greater desire for scientific knowledge, theoretical tools and professional development. The word *theory* was used seven times and the word *practical* five times, so the practical aspects were not emphasised as much in the qualitative data on Swedish students. For example, the respondents (F = Finnish students; S = Swedish students) reported on: *theory and practical tips in a proper relation (F, 12)* or *previous and current research (S, 68).*

Expected Focus Areas in the Work of Special Educators

With the open-ended question – *What does the special educator have to know in his/her work?* – we wanted to know what the student teachers thought they at least needed to know or were able to do; several focus areas were noted. After conducting a content analysis, we ended up with seven core issues common to all the respondents (Figures 1 and 2). The two most often mentioned were *co-operation/ consultation* and *pedagogical issues*, followed by *interaction skills* and *learning difficulties*. The order of these issues was a little different and depended on the respondents' education and nationality. In addition to the just mentioned areas, there were responses about pupil-related issues which could be subsumed under *the rights discourse*. A few mentions were also made of issues outside the class and school – *focusing on the bigger picture*. Finally, a category including several isolated responses – *other* – was detected.

The Finnish students assumed that the most central areas of their future work were co-operation/consultation as well as pedagogical issues and learning difficulties. Nevertheless, the Swedish students agreed, except that they placed interaction skills, not learning difficulties, among the top three issues. The difference in opinion between the Swedish special teacher students and SENCo students was greater for learning difficulties and co-operation and consultation (see Figure 1). Swedish

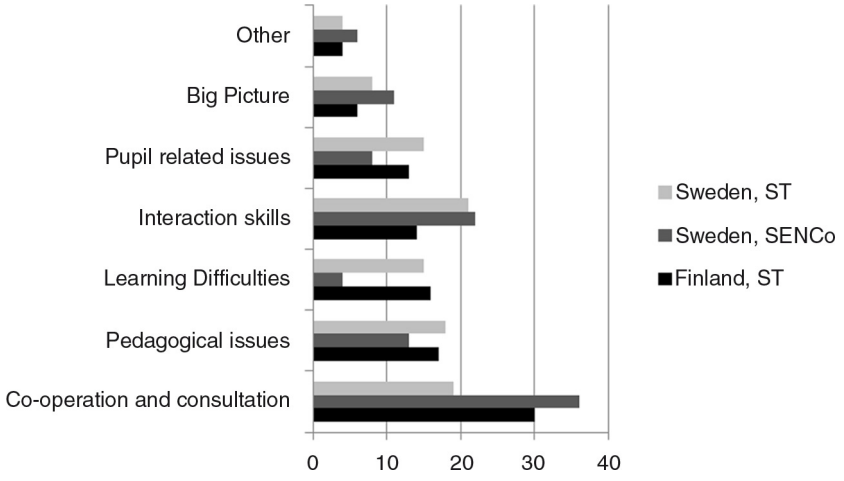


Figure 1. The percentages of the focus areas concerning what a special educator needs to know in Finland and Sweden according to students (ST =special teacher student).

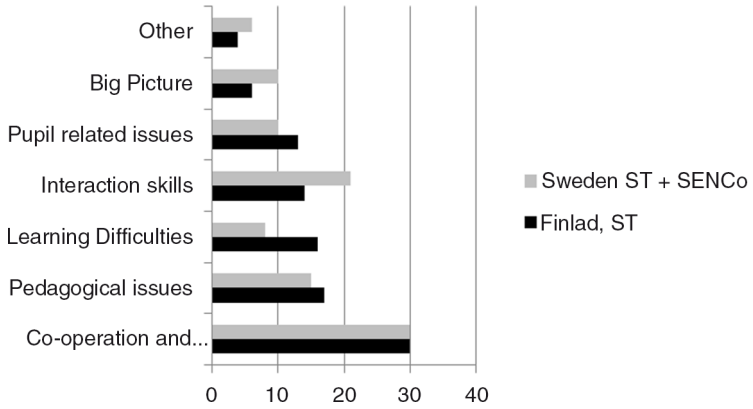


Figure 2. The percentages of the focus areas concerning what a special educator needs to know in Finland and Sweden according to students (ST = special teacher student).

special teacher students voted more for learning difficulties than SENCo students; the results were inverse in relation to co-operation/consultation.

However, if we put the views of the Swedish STSs and SENCo students together and compared the result with the Finnish students' responses, the greatest difference would be in learning difficulties and interaction skills. The Finnish students expected learning difficulties to be more central in their work than their Swedish colleagues. However, compared to Finnish students, Swedish students expected that interaction skills, which carry many credits in the Swedish special education curriculum, would be more central.

The two figures show some difference in the expected work profile of Swedish special educators. Next, we will present examples relating to the top focus areas. Because special teacher students and SENCos study together during the first year, we did not separate their comments.

Consultation/co-operation and interaction skills

The concepts of consultation and co-operation partly overlap as both imply an aspect of working together, hence the reason for placing them in the same category. In addition, both *require interaction skills*, which could also be merged with this category. In the Finnish data, co-operation was mentioned more often than consultation, which seems to be more common in Sweden. Interestingly, parents/guardians were seldom mentioned as an expected partner in co-operation in the Finnish data, and only three out of 40 of the Swedish SENCo students mentioned them. This is notable since the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010, 800) states that the pupils and their parents should be given access to and influence over the child's documentation. This presents an opportunity to strengthen the pupils' and guardians' participation as well as to give the pupils more opportunities to take responsibility for their studies. However, as has been argued in other similar studies

(see, for example, Andreasson 2007; Hofvendahl 2006), Asp-Onsjö (2012) argues that parental influence is, in reality, very limited.

This category also included several responses relating to multi-professional work, that is, adults other than just teachers, like psychologists, social workers or medical staff. These issues were represented in quotes like: *co-operation with different professionals and with parents (F, 15)* or *to be able to give practical advice to the staff (S, 9)*.

Communication skills and social skills were combined into *interaction skills*. Interaction skills received a significant number of comments. Although important, the training of social skills is not widely available in Finland and is more so in Sweden (see Table 1). This quote reflects the core expectation: *to be able to be flexible, to navigate and to have a sense of humour (F, 29)*.

Pedagogical issues and learning difficulties

Here, pedagogical issues refer to aspects of teaching while learning difficulties relate more to knowledge and theoretical aspects. Pedagogical issues were mentioned more often by Finnish students. Examples of pedagogical issues are represented in the following quotes: *using diverse teaching methods in order to differentiate teaching (F, 5)* or *contributing to new ways of working in class which can support pupils (S, 44)*.

Learning difficulties were mentioned in the core expectations as an area about which a teacher needed to be very knowledgeable and one in which he/she had the ability to recognise and intervene. The responses included demands for knowledge as well as strategies regarding how to proceed with certain learning difficulties. This theme was also more present in the Finnish data. As the following examples show, this relates strongly to the *pedagogical issues*: *to know a lot about various things, influencing and supporting learning when there are problems (21, F)* or *to get better at reading and writing related difficulties (S, 48)*.

Less crucial areas

Pupils were indirectly included in several responses, which often resembled the rights discourse. These were mentioned more by special teacher students in both countries and not so much by the SENCo students, as per the following comments: *courage to find solutions for the benefit of the pupil despite resistance from other teachers (F, 26)* or *to stand up for the rights and needs of children (S, 49)*.

Some students' expectations went beyond the present moment. *The big picture* category included issues outside the class or outside the school. The comments here demanded an outsider's perspective and an understanding of connections; one could also say it needed a wider perspective. As one student put it: *to have an umbrella perspective (S, 16)* or another: *to know the service structure of the area (F, 11)*. SENCo students mentioned these issues more than others.

In addition, isolated things, like knowing how to use devices, affecting attitudes or being a chameleon were mentioned. In the Swedish data, scientific knowledge was also mentioned several times, like *bringing in new research and science in school (S, 67)*.

To summarise, it is obvious that the dominant discourse on expectations relates to encountering other professionals and parents in co-operative situations, which are often challenging and demand excellent interaction skills. In addition, the students expect a network around them. They also assume that it is not possible to be a special educator without a central knowledge of pedagogy and learning difficulties.

The responses to the third open-ended question – *What do you consider as central to special education?* – repeats what has already been reported with regard to the core areas. We will only say that both pupils' and teachers' perspectives were present in the central issues.

Summary

Using ecological theory to make sense of the results, we can state that the main expectations discourse was situated at the micro and mesolevels. Teachers wrote chiefly about work in the class or in their own resource room. They also mentioned other school professionals making connections between existing microsystems. There were also a few remarks about parents. The educational policy was involved in some students' discourse; therefore, the exosystem was present mostly in the SENCos' comments. However, values and attitudes were seldom discussed, making the macrosystem-related issues almost non-existent.

This could be due to the items in the questionnaire since they primarily tapped daily issues, often on a micro-level.

Nevertheless, some remarks about pupils' rights and attitudes towards diversity were detected. The future special educators saw their work quite traditionally; they will be working with pupils in both inclusive and segregated settings, they will be members of a multi-professional team, and they will consult with other teachers. Consulting related more to the work of Swedish SENCos than to that of Swedish or Finnish special teachers, although the latter group engages in it. The SENCos also work less with pupils (also see Lindqvist 2013). Finnish special teachers expect they will more often work in segregated settings with small groups of pupils (also see Statistics Finland 2013). Inclusion was expected and supported more in Sweden, but in both countries it was supported more by respondents who had worked longer than others. Interaction skills were expected to be very important and even more so in Sweden than in Finland. In research conducted in nine universities in the USA, special ($N = 150$) and general student teachers ($N = 87$) received very little training in social skills, and special student teachers received somewhat more (Dobbins et al. 2010). In a comparative study of special teachers' education (Brownell et al. 2005), a strong demand was made for interaction with students, parents and administrators.

In relation to learning difficulties, there was a small discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative data. In the qualitative data, learning difficulties were expected to be quite central for the Finnish respondents, which was not the case in the quantitative data.

Teachers in Sweden, mostly Swedish class teachers, were judged to be willing to co-operate with special educators more so than their Finnish colleagues. However, as seen elsewhere (Saloviita and Takala 2010; Takala and Uusitalo 2012), the lack of planning time was considered the greatest challenge to co-operation. The individual educational plan (IEP) was expected to be important in both countries, but more so in Finland, although the students assumed it was not used as effectively as it could have been. IEPs and other compulsory plans have increased the amount of paperwork for special educators in both countries. Interestingly, the majority of the Finnish respondents and almost as many of the Swedish respondents thought that the goals of the IEP will often be forgotten in everyday work.

With regard to their own initial education, contact education was appreciated more by the Finns than by the Swedes. Research education and scientific knowledge were mentioned more by the Swedish respondents. The Swedes have participated in distance education as part of their special teacher education for years. By contrast, it has only been used for a few years in Helsinki, Finland. Research has been part of teacher education in Finland for 30 years (Jakku-Sihvonen and Niemi 2006); therefore, the Finnish respondents may have found it unnecessary to mention it.

In sum, the Swedish student teachers expect that they will co-operate more, that they will have more positive thoughts towards inclusion and that they will better appreciate interaction skills than their Finnish counterparts. Finnish special teachers expect to be working more with pupils and in their own resource room. Nevertheless, the reality may differ significantly from the expected results.

This study has limitations. It consisted of only 117 participants. Moreover, there were two types of students from Sweden, which makes the comparison uncertain. The questionnaire consisted of a limited number of closed questions, and the content might have been interpreted differently in these two countries. The response rate was 100 percent in Sweden, but not all students responded in Finland. In addition, the respondents had so far had quite limited experience in the field of special education. However, the main results are in line with previous research (Göransson et al. 2011; Takala et al. 2012), and the conformability of the qualitative analysis was verified using two independent readers. In addition, ecological theory seemed insufficient for explaining the expectations.

Discussion

The main conclusion of this study is that practical know-how-knowledge is dominant in students' views of their future profession. The findings indicate that the examples given by the respondents in the open-ended questions are primarily related to

everyday social practices, such as consultation, communication, documentation, guidance and piloting and are characterised by docility and loyalty to the school. Consequently, there is a lack of examples of scientific know-why-knowledge, that is, the scientific knowledge of practice. It is noteworthy and perhaps contradictory that the Swedish respondents expressed a need for scientific knowledge but gave no further or insightful comments on what they meant or the importance of linking theory to practice. Further, many of our respondents have work experience. They described themselves in their future position as a "spider in the web", a link between pupils, teachers, parents, school heads and resource persons in the school. Is this what teacher educators and parents want the special educators to be? Is it more central to function at the micro and meso levels than at the exo or macro levels? When we go to a doctor, it is more important for us as individuals that the doctor can treat our painful ear than to be able to discuss or organise medical care nationally. However, developing the education and school as an institute is also important; somebody needs to plan the future.

A combination of our students' high level of formal education and work experience offers them, at least in theory, a position of power. They can be the change agents at school (also see Simola 1998). In their future work, they will have insights into different perspectives and decision-making processes that directly or indirectly affect pupils' opportunities for equal education. However, according to the data, none of the respondents raised a critical voice. Their responses were consistently politically correct, diplomatic and uncritical. The results led to further questions of how universities and education organisers can meet the students' need for adequate scientific knowledge and enable them to recognise and challenge taken-for-granted truths and how to encourage them to make independent and critical assessments. It also led to questions about how today's students will be able to reflect on their own in their future position as well as collective notions and expectations that are taken for granted within the profession. Finally, the question remains whether the present political and economic conditions permit such development or whether this is a utopia in the Nordic educational context.

All in all, Sweden seems to be more inclusive with less segregated special education than Finland (Statistics Finland 2013; Swedish National Agency for Education 2014). With this, we could argue that the rights of all children to equal education are better fulfilled in Sweden. However, the market orientation has resulted in a growing number of private schools in Sweden. These schools do not always have sufficient support available; rather, they allow children to perform tasks independently (Ramberg 2013; Ståhle 2006), which seems to be against children's rights to necessary education. The new Finnish three-part support model has reduced the amount of special education in Finland. Nevertheless, according to a new report (Ministry of Education and Culture 2014), the three levels of support: general,

intensified and special, have not been properly implemented. The process is unfinished. It is noteworthy that the role of the special teacher in Finland is changing, and one strengthening role, in addition to the old expert in learning difficulties, is of a similar kind to the Swedish SENCo's role as an advisor. This needs to be considered by Finnish and other Nordic teacher educators. Which kinds of roles are expected from these professionals in the future? What kind of agency is demanded?

For further research, we need a follow-up study on whether studying for the entire year and working for more years in special education can change the idea of the expected focus areas of the profession. We also need more research on the different work profiles of these professionals. The selected theory did not cover all elements of the discussion. In future research, the theory of agency (Bandura 2001) might also be useful. Agency can be seen as the competence to act in certain situations and environments, which develops with time, education or experience. Agency can be seen as action according to the rules and regulations or against them (Gresalfi et al. 2009). The agency of a special educator is only part of the agency as such; it also encompasses the agency of special education as a science (see Pickering 1995). Agency seemed to be used according to existing practices and rules. However, school is changing. The Swedish school promotes the neoliberal educational policy with its independent school system whereby teachers increasingly take on entrepreneurial roles. What kind of agency does that demand? What kind of agency does the new three-form support system in Finland demand?

We can now say that education as an institution, as well as the way of working, is in a state of continuous flux. All this makes new demands on teacher education; we claim that at least in Sweden, this is a product of the neoliberal structure. As pointed out previously, a plethora of versions of neoliberal 'new public management' models are being applied to higher education. Their administrative and policy development is now ideologically hegemonic even if actual practices vary. The problems of the Taylorist structure and its authoritarian and hierarchical system are, however, that it promotes a lack of communication among the component units, and as Greenwood (2012) expresses it "Workers are treated as 'hands' rather than 'heads' and all decisions are made by engineers and managers at some distance from the production process" (2012, 116). Perhaps Greenwood's argument can partly explain why the informants were so diplomatic and politically correct in their responses. This indicates that when our student teachers elucidated their views on their future profession, they had already taken a position of being "hands" and not "heads" in the school organisation (also see Lindqvist 2013). How this position can be challenged is, however, a question for special teacher education in both countries.

The time when special educators worked in their own room with one individual has passed. They expect that they will be in a web with contacts with several professionals and stakeholders. Special educators envision themselves as multi-taskers

with special educational know-how and good interaction skills. Teacher education needs to educate professionals who can act as excellent professionals (De Arment, Reed and Wetzel 2013; Hattie 2003) and will also be able to develop the education system. How does this happen in Sweden with its neoliberal educational policy and in Finland, which bases its education system on teachers' expertise and mutual trust (Sahlberg 2011), is a question that demands more research.

Marjatta Takala, PhD, Visiting Professor at Umeå University, Institute of Pedagogy, Sweden; Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki in the Department of Special Education, Finland. Her research interests include comparative special education, hearing-impairment and communication.
Kim Wickman, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer and Researcher, Department of Education, Umeå University, Sweden. Teaching in courses related to gender, diversity and sport mainly in the Special Needs, Sport Science and Physical Education and Health Programmes. Her research interests include sport, gender and disability.
Lotta Uusitalo-Malmivaara, PhD, is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki in the Department of Special Education, Finland. Her research interests include learning disabilities and positive psychology, especially school-related happiness, character strengths and mindfulness.
Agneta Lundström, Senior Lecturer, Department of Applied Educational Science, University of Umeå, Sweden. Teaching about conflict-management, counselling and educational work with socio-emotional difficulties. Her research interests are conflict-management and gender.

References

Ahlberg, A. (2007). Specialpedagogik – ett kunskapsområde i utveckling. [Special Education – an area of knowledge in development]. C. Nilholm and E. Björck-Åkesson, (eds.). In *Reflektioner kring specialpedagogik – sex professorer om forskningsområdet och forskningsfronterna*. [Reflections on Special Education – six professors about the research field and the research fronts] 66–84. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council, Report 2007: 5.

Ahonen, S. (2003). *Yhteinen koulu. Tasa-arvoa vai tasapäisyyttä?* [A comprehensive school. Equality or even?] Tampere: Vastapaino.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T. & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools developing inclusion*. London: Routledge.

Amendments of the Finnish Basic Education Act (642/2010). *Perusopetuslain muutokset*. http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2010/20100642 (Accessed 2013-03-08).

Andreasson, I. (2007). *Elevplanen som text- om identitet, genus, makt och styrning i skolans elevdokumentation* [The pupil plan as a text about identity, gender, power and control in pupils' school documentation], 259. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Arnesen, A-L. & Lundhal, L. (2006). Still social and democratic? Inclusive education policies in the Nordic welfare states. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50(3), 285–300.

Asp-Onsjö, L. (2012). Elevdokumentation, föräldrainflytande och motstånd i den svenska skolan. [Pupil documentation, parental influence and resistance in Swedish schools]. *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 21(3), 71–90.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: an agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1–26.

Beach, D. & Bagley, C. (2013). Changing professional discourses in teacher education policy back towards a training paradigm: a comparative study. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(4), 379–392.

Beach, D. & Bagley, C. (2012). The weakening role of education studies and the re-traditionalisation of Swedish teacher education. *Oxford Educational Review*, 38(3), 287–303.

Berge, B.-M. (2013). Tracing the women-friendly welfare state: gendered politics of everyday life in Sweden. In *Tracing the Women-Friendly Welfare State: Gendered Politics of Everyday Life in Sweden*, Åsa Gunnarsson (ed.), 147–169. Halmstad: Makadam.

Berhanu, G. (2010). Even in Sweden? Excluding the included: some reflections on the consequences of new policies on educational processes and outcomes, and equity in education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 25(3), 148–159.

Blomqvist, P. (2004). The choice revolution: privatization of Swedish welfare service in the 1990s. *Social Policy and Administration*, 38(2), 139–55.

Booth, T. and Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion. Developing learning and participation in school*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. UK. http://www.resource-package-on-disability.org/1-one-inclusive-educ-disability/1.3-operat-sup-materials/163-csie-index-incl-school.pdf (Accessed 2014-02-24).

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32, 513–531.

Bronfenbrenber, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University press.

Brownell, M.T., Ross, D.D., Colon, E.P. & McCallum, C.L. (2005). Critical features of special education teacher preparation: a comparison with general teacher education. *Journal of Special Education*, 38(4), 242–252.

Conderman, G., Johnston-Rodriquez, S., Hartman, P. & Walker, D. (2012). Honoring voices from beginning special educators for making changes in teacher preparation. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 36(1), 65–76.

De Arment, S., Reed, E. & Wetzel, A.P. (2013). Promoting adaptive expertise: a conceptual framework for special education preparation. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 36(3), 217–230.

Dobbins, N., Higgins, K., Pierce, T., Tandy, R.D. & Tincani, M. (2010). An analysis of social skills instruction provided in teacher education and in-service training programs for general and special educators. *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(5), 358–367.

Equal Rights. Lika rättigheter i skolan – handling. (2012). Equality Omdudsmannen. Taber: Taber Tryckeri.

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2013a). Inclusion. Country page. http://www.european-agency.org/search/custom/Inclusion?f[0]=bundle%3Acountry_page (Accessed 2014-07-01).

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2013b). *Teacher training – basic and specialist teacher training in Sweden*. http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/sweden/national-overview/teacher-training-basic-and-specialist-teacher-training (Accessed 2014-01-22).

Farrell, M. (2009). *Foundations of special education: an introduction*. UKI: Wiley & Blackwell.

Finnish Basic Education Act (1998/628). *Perusopetuslaki*. http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980628 (Accessed 2014-07-01).

Finnish National Board on Education. (2011). *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteiden muutokset ja täydennykset 2010*. [Changes and supplements of the basics of the curriculum for compulsory schools]. Regulations and orders 2011: 20.

Forlin, C. (2010). Reframing teacher education for inclusion. In *Teacher education for inclusion. Changing paradigms and innovative approaches*, C. Forlin (ed.). New York: Routledge.

Greenwood, D.J. (2010). Doing and learning action research in the neo-liberal world of contemporary higher education. *Action Research*, 10(2), 115–132.

Gresalfi, M., Martin, T., Hand, V. & Greeno, J. (2009). Constructing competence: an analysis of student participation in the activity systems of mathematics classrooms. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 70(1), 49–70.

Göransson, K., Nilholm, C. & Karlsson, K. (2011). Inclusive education in Sweden? A critical analysis. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(5), 541–555.

Halinen, I. & Järvinen, R. (2008). Towards inclusive education. *Prospects*, 38(1), 77–97.

Hattie, J. (2003). *Teachers make a difference. What is the research evidence?* Auckland Australian Council for Educational research Annual Conference. http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Pedagogy-and-assessment/Building-effective-learning-environments/Teachers-Make-a-Difference-What-is-the-Research-Evidence (Accessed 2014-05-05).

Hausstätter, S.R. & Takala, M. (2008). The core of special teacher education: a comparison of Finland and Norway. *European Journal of Special Education*, 23(2), 121–134.

Hofvendahl, J. (2006). *Riskabla samtal: en analys av potentiella faror i skolans kvarts- och utvecklingssamtal*. [Risky conversations: an analysis of potential hazards in schools' discussions on progress]. Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet [National Swedish Institute for Working Life].

Isaksson, J., Lindqvist, R. & Bergström, E. (2010). Pupils with special educational needs: a study of the assessments and categorising processes regarding pupils' school difficulties in Sweden. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(2), 133–151.

Jakku- Sihvonen, R. & Niemi, H. (eds.). (2006). *Research-based teacher education in Finland – reflections by Finnish teacher educators*. Finnish Educational Research Association. Publication 25. Turku: Painosalama.

Kalenga, R.C. & Fourie, E. (2011). Trekking back to mainstream for inclusive education, is it there? *Educational Studies*, 38(2), 175–187.

Kansanen, P. (2014). Teaching as a master's level profession in Finland: theoretical reflections and practical solutions. In *Workplace Learning in Teacher Education. International Practice and Policy*, O. McNamara, J. Murray, and M. Jones (eds.), 279–292. Dordrecht: Springer.

Kallioniemi, A., Toom, A., Ubani, M. and Linnansaari, H. (eds.) (2010). *Akateeminen luokanopettajakoulutus: 30 vuotta teoriaa, käytäntöä ja maistereita*. Finnish Educational Research Association. University press: Jyväskylä.

Kivirauma, J. (2010). Erityisopettajaksi kouluttautuminen ennen erityisopettajakoulutusta. [To be a special teacher before special teacher education]. *Kasvatus ja Aika* [Education and Time], 4(4), 91–100.

Lindensjö, B. & Lundgren, U.P. (2000). *Utbildningspolitik och politisk styrning* [Educational policy and political guidance] Stockholm: HLS.

Lindqvist, G. (2013). *Who should do what to whom? Occupational groups' views on special needs*. PhD diss., Jönköping University.

Lundahl, L., Erixon Arreman, I., Holm, A.-S. & Lundström, U. (2013). Educational marketization the Swedish way. *Education Inquiry*, 4(3), 497–517.

Meyers, A.B., Meyers, J., Graybill, E.C., Proctor, S.L. & Huddleston, L. (2012). Ecological approaches to organizational consultation and systems change in educational settings. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 22(1), 106–124.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2014). *Oppimisen ja hyvinvoinnin tuki. Selvitys kolmiportaisen tuen toimeenpanosta*. [Supporting learning and well-being. Report on the implementation of three-step support] Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture 2014: 2. http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2014/liitteet/okm02.pdf?lang=fi (Accessed 2014-02-25).

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2007). *Strategy of Special Education*. Report 47. Helsinki: University Press. www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2007/liitteet/tr47.pdf?lang=fi (Accessed 2014-01-01).

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2014). *Oppimisen ja hyvinvoinnin tuki- Selvitys kolmipostaisen tuen toimeenpanosta*. [Support for learning and well-being. A clarification of implementation of three-step support.] Publications 2014:2.

Odom, S.L. & Diamond, K.E. (1998). Inclusion of young children with special needs in early childhood education: the research base. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13(1), 3–25.

Panula, A.-M. (2013). *Reading difficulties and part time special education – a follow up from preschool to the end of 9th grade*. University of Helsinki. Faculty of Behavioral Sciences. Department of Teacher Education. PhD diss., Helsinki University. Research 344.

Pearson, S. (2010). The role of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs): "to be or not to be". *Psychology of Education Review*, 34(2), 30–38.

Persson, B. (2009). Finns det en specialpedagogisk agenda? – Om utbildningspolitik och elever i behov av särskilt stöd. [Is there a special education agenda? – On education policy and pupils with special educational needs.] *Kritisk utbildningstidskrift*. Nr. 4/2009, sid. 11-27.

Pickering, A. (1995). *The mangle of practice: time, agency, and science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ramberg, J. (2013). Special educational resources in the Swedish upper secondary schools: a total population survey. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28(4): 440–462. doi: 10.1080/08856257.2013.820458

Romero-Contreras, S., Garcia-Cedillo, I., Forlin, C. & Lomeli-Hernandez, K.A. (2013). Preparing teachers for inclusion in Mexico: how effective is this process? *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 39(5), 509–522.

Runswick-Cole, K. & Hodge, N. (2009). Strengthening the special educational needs element of initial teacher training and education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36(4), 198–203.

Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish lessons: what can the world learn from educational change in Finland*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Schilling, J. (2006). On the pragmatics of qualitative assessment: designing the process for content analysis. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 22(1), 28–37.

Saloviita, T. (2012). *Mitä inkluusio tarkoittaa?* [What does inclusion mean?] http://users.jyu.fi/~saloviit/tutkimus/inclusion.html (Accessed 2014-01-01).

SFS. (2011). *Statute of Postgraduate Diploma in Special Needs Training* [Examensordning] 2011:186. Stockholm: The Government.

SFS. (2007). *Statute of Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education Needs* [Examensordning] 2007:638. Stockholm: The Government.

Simola, H. (1998). Toiveet, lupaukset ja koulun arki – opettaja muutoksen puristuskessa. [Hopes, promises and the daily work at schools – a teacher in the pressures of changes]. *Didacta Varia*, 3(1), 11–34.

Sindelar, P., Dewey, J., Rosenberg, M.S., Corbett, N.L., Denslow, D. & Lofinia, B. (2012). Cost effectiveness of alternative route special education teacher preparation. *Exceptional Children*, 79(1), 25–42.

SPSM. (2014). Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheter. [Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools] Rätt till stöd. [Right to support] http://www.spsm.se/sv/Stod-i-skolan/Lagar-och-rattigheter/Ratt-till-sarskilt-stod/ (Accessed 2014-05-02).

Statistics Finland. (2013). Special Education. Tables. http://www.stat.fi/til/erop/tau_en.html, (Accessed 2014-01-01).

Ståhle, Y. (2006). *Pedagogiken i tiden: om framväxten av nya undervisningsformer under tidigt 2000-tal – exemplet Kunskapsskolan*. [Pedagogy of today: On the development of new teaching methods during the early 2000s. A case study of Kunskaps school] PhD diss., College of Teacher Education. Stockholm.

Swain, J., Griffiths, C. & Heyman, B. (2003). Towards a social model approach to counselling disabled clients. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 31(1), 137–152.

Swedish Education Act. (2010). Svensk författningssamling, Skollagen. [The Swedish Code of Statutes. Education Act] 2010: 800. http://www.notisum.se/rnp/sls/sfs/20100800.pdf (Accessed 2014-01-01).

Swedish Higher Education Authority. (2014). Ökande men inte tillräckligt stort intresse för lärarutbildningen [Increasing but not sufficient interest in teacher education]. Stockholm. http://www.uk-ambetet.se/download/18.33aabd801444f30d0c62/lararutbildningen-statistisk-analys-2014-2.pdf (Accessed 2014-02-26).

Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket]. (2014). Statistics in tables. Särskilt stöd i grundskolan läsåret 2012/2013. [Special support in basic education academic year 2012/2013] http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/statistik-i-tabeller (Accessed 2014-05-02).

Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket]. (2013). Statistik om särskilt stöd i grundskolan [Statistics of special support in comprehensive school] http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/nyhetsarkiv/2.7602/statistik-om-sarskilt-stod-i-grundskolan-1.208095 (Accessed 2014-02-20).

Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket]. (2012). Rätt till kunskap och särskilt stöd. [Right to scholarship and special support]. Stockholm. http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.159813!/Menu/article/attachment/R%C3%A4tt till kunskap och s%C3%A4rskilt st%C3%B6d 120612.pdf (Accessed 2014-01-22).

Swedish National Agency for Education (2011). Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet. [Curriculum for primary and lower secondary education, preschools and leisure time centres] http://www.skolverket.se/laroplaner-amnen-och-kurser/grundskoleutbildning/grundskola/laroplan (Accessed 2014-02-24).

Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket]. (2008). *Allmänna råd och kommentarer. Den individuella utvecklingsplanen med skriftliga omdömen*. [General advice and comments. The individual development with written assessments], 8:1071. Stockholm.

Swedish National Agency for Education. (2005). *Ökat inflytande med individuella utvecklingsplaner*. [Increased influence with individual development plans.] Stockholm: Fritzes.

Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. (Högskoleverket HSV). (2012). *Behovet av särskild specialpedagogexamen och specialpedagogisk kompetens i den svenska skolan*. [The need for a separate special education degree and special education competence in Swedish schools]. Rapport 2012:11 R.

The Swedish National Commission for UNESCO. (2008). Svenska Unescorådet. *Riktlinjer för inkludering – att garantera tillgång till utbildning för alla*. [Inclusive policies – to ensure access to education for all] Stockholm: Swedish National Commission for UNESCO.

Takala, M. & Astrid, A. (2014). Special education in Swedish and Finnish schools – seeing the forest or the trees? *British Journal of Special Education*, 412(1), 59–81.

Takala, M., Hausstätter, R.S., Ahl, A. & Head, G. (2012). Inclusion seen by student teachers in special education – differences among Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish students. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 305–325.

Takala, M. & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, L. (2012). A one-year study of the development of co-teaching in four Finnish schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27(3), 373–390.

Takala, M., Pirttimaa, R. & Törmänen, M. (2009). Inclusive special education: the role of special education teachers in Finland. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36(3), 162–173.

Tsokkinen, A. (1984). Suomen sokeainkoulut ja niiden oppilaat 1865–1917. [Finnish schools for the blind and their pupils during 1865-1917] Studia Historica Jyväskyläensia 29. Jyväskylä.

Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. (2002). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällön analyysi* [Qualitative research and content analysis.]. Jyväskylä: Gummerus.

Umeå University. (2013a). Special teacher programme. http://www.umu.se/utbildning/program-kurser/utbildningsplanesok/utbildningsplan-detalj?code=LYSPL (Accessed 2014-01-07).

Umeå University. (2013b). Special pedagogue programme. http://www.umu.se/utbildning/program-kurser/utbildningsplanesok/utbildningsplan-detalj?code=LYSPE (Accessed 2014-01-07).

UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca Statement on principles, policy and practice in special education. http://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Bildung/Salamanca_Declaration.pdf (Accessed 2014-01-07).

University of Helsinki. (2013). Faculty of Education. *Hakijoiden ja hyväksyttyjen määrät 2013*. [Number of applicants and accepted students in 2013]. http://www.helsinki.fi/behav/valinnat/tilastot.htm (Accessed 2014-01-07).

Van Manen, M. (1993). *The tact of teaching*. London, ON, Canada: Althouse Press.